



MEETING OF GULF OF MEXICO STATES AND FEDERAL OFFICIALS

**ROOKERY BAY NATIONAL ESTUARINE RESEARCH RESERVE
NAPLES, FLORIDA**

JUNE 9, 2005

MEETING SUMMARY

The following summarizes key highlights during the June 9 meeting of state and federal agency representatives

WELCOME, INTRODUCTIONS, AND REVIEW OF AGENDA

Laura Cantral, Meridian Institute, welcomed the group, and asked participant introductions, and reviewed the meeting agenda.

Secretary Colleen Castille, Florida Department of Environmental Protection offered opening remarks:

- Despite differences, the five Gulf States agreed on the five white paper priorities.
- Science is central to understanding these priorities.
- After State-led white paper presentations and federal responses, then stakeholders will be included, and measurable objectives will be finalized for an Action Plan in November.

THE U.S. OCEAN ACTION PLAN AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE GULF OF MEXICO

James L. Connaughton, Chair, White House Council on Environmental Quality offered remarks:

- This meeting is important to the President.
- It is only through a thriving economy that we can make the next generation of investments in the environment and bring about the needed changes.
- There will always be limited resources. Strategic partnerships, capitalizing on existing programs, matching funds, planning ahead and inspiring the people on the ground is the best way to leverage the millions of dollars already being spent on the Gulf.
- Many programs overlap and/or have similar objectives.
- The federal government can and does throw millions at environmental projects, but we need bite-sized projects with definable goals and timelines.
- Using the best technology and awareness of linkages, we are positioned to attain a “productive harmony.”

THE GULF OF MEXICO: A CONSERVATION PERSPECTIVE

David Guggenheim, Ph.D., Consultant, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, gave a presentation that provided some context for the need for a Gulf Action Plan by highlighting some key characteristics of the Gulf:

- There are many ecological treasures in the Gulf of Mexico that people know nothing about.
- Many of the Gulf's environmental problems have been fixed, but many remain.
- Inconsistencies in Gulf health between places points to a need for better science.
- There is a great urgency for action, given the pace of development.
- We need to look beyond political boundaries and talk specifically about shifting to an ecosystem-based approach.
- I hope our generation will lead the way towards a healthy Gulf of Mexico.

THE "STATE OF THE GULF OF MEXICO SUMMIT" AND ALLIANCE OF THE GULF STATES

Dr. Robert Furgason, Ph.D., President, Harte Research Institute for Gulf of Mexico Studies at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, presented information about the Harte Institute for Gulf of Mexico Studies and the planning and preparation for the Gulf of Mexico Summit:

- The Harte Institute is hosting the Gulf of Mexico Summit, to be held November 7-9, 2005. Texas Governor Perry has invited all Gulf Governors to participate.
- The Harte Institute works to bridge policy decisions to good science, generate and disseminate knowledge, encourage tri-national responsibility, collaboration and cooperation with other Gulf partners and research on marine policy and law, coastal and marine GIS, ecosystem studies, modeling and marine biodiversity.
- Let's make a difference.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT FOR THE FEDERAL RESPONSE TO THE ALLIANCE WHITE PAPERS

Jack Hayes, Ph.D., Deputy Assistant Administrator for Ocean and Coastal Zone Management, NOAA National Ocean Service, and Bryon O. Griffith, Director, U.S. EPA Gulf of Mexico Program Office, Federal co-leads, offered background and context for the federal response to the white papers:

- Federal agencies want to help by offering the programs we have and applying them.
- Federal agencies are committed to a longer term partnership.
- We are striving for high-impact responses to the white papers. It's quality, not quantity.
- We're trying to make a difference in the next 12 to 18 months.
- The initial proposals offered today are to stimulate discussion. We want your ideas and will solidify for November meeting, where we have to commit to deliverables.
- The federal work group agrees to work within existing frameworks and not create new ones.
- Follow a place-based ecosystem management framework.
- Involve as many stakeholders and leaders as the process will bear.
- Encourage and support the involvement of Mexico
- Will be drawing from 13 federal agencies and their many programs.

- Shared accountability and shared workload between states and feds.
- In crafting the Action Plan consider metrics and indicators.
- In crafting the Action Plan search for a tighter geographical focus (the opportunity is in the details).
- The federal fiscal budget process is currently closed, but the engines are running and we're trying to get the federal programs flying in formation.

WHITE PAPER DISCUSSION 1: REDUCTIONS IN NUTRIENT LOADING

Preparation of the white paper on reductions in nutrient loading was led by Mississippi.

Phil Bass, Director of the Office of Pollution Control, presented a summary of the white paper.

- Problem Statement/Goal: Introduction of excess nutrients into the estuaries and waters of the Gulf is one of the primary problems facing the five Gulf States.
- All states are working to develop nutrient strategy criteria, but still wrestling with causes and reducing nutrients in a cost-effective manner.
- All states have to spread budget over many water bodies. Prioritizing is difficult.
- When budgets drop, monitoring is typically cut first.
- We all need better assessment tools.
- Population growth is a major issue for all states.
- States have different agencies doing the monitoring – communication.

Federal Response: Jack Hayes and Bryon Griffith

- “No leverage, no chance” on this issue, at least on a regional scale.
- Proposed project: Gulf Hypoxia Reassessment Science Coordination (EPA) would be a coordinated delivery to the Gulf States of continually advancing nutrients science and data tools and resources. Would take what isn't in this reassessment and include a symposium to the Gulf States.
- Proposed project: Innovative Producer Partnership Initiative, MS River Basin (EPA). Development and support of a strategic public-private partnership to reduce nutrient loadings to the Gulf of Mexico with the leading agricultural producers in the MS River Basin.

Questions and Comments

- The states confirm that the white papers are a start to the discussion and they are not complete.
- The federal agencies request more definition of the states' needs – scope, scale and metrics – for instance, think of priority watersheds.
- There is a failure to build infrastructure at the state level and also a need for data.
- The federal agencies can provide data – but how, when, where and in what framework?
- Can the states commit to a joint monitoring strategy for the Gulf region?
- Federal agencies need the states to point to a specific place on the ground to start the process.

WHITE PAPER DISCUSSION 2: IMPROVING AND PROTECTING WATER QUALITY WITH EMPHASIS ON BEACHES & SHELLFISH BEDS

Preparation of the white paper on improving and protecting water quality was led by Florida.

Frank Nearhoof, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, presented a summary of the white paper.

- Problem statement/Goal: to develop collaborative efforts to address elevated bacteria levels, Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs), hypoxia and toxic contamination (notable is mercury contamination in upper level fish).
- Need to identify appropriate criteria.
- Need spatial and temporal data, better tracking tools and monitoring of both upland and aquatic areas.

Questions and Comments

- Louisiana willing to share its landscape monitoring tools
- Would love to learn from other states, but dealing with this in a comprehensive manner is difficult.
- The white papers are a distillation of priority areas.
- Need to put data into single organizing frame.
- There are on the ground things we'd do tomorrow if we had the facilities and abilities to do that. We need specific identifiable things to do.
- Federal agencies want to know if the resources being deployed to each state are going to the appropriate places to address these issues.
- States don't have a great understanding of where the federal agencies are spending their money.
- There are a number of US Ocean Action Plan items that can be done by the federal agencies, but states need to communicate what they want.
- USGS has a lot of data that can help the states.
- It's not all about the data; states need information derived from data to help with management.

Federal Response: Jack Hayes and Bryon Griffith

- Goal is to protect water quality and aquatic life.
- Proposed Project: Harmful Algal Blooms Forecasting/Observing System (NOAA) to improve our ability to detect and predict them and ultimately achieve a Gulfwide observing system.
- Proposed Project: Regional Shellfish Information Management System (NOAA) to improve quality information on shellfish growing areas and ultimately develop a regional assessment capability for the scale and scope of shellfish growing water closures and the problems contributing to closures.
- Proposed Project: Mercury in Gulf Fish Tissue (EPA & NOAA) to apply data to several key areas by incorporating the results of a survey of mercury in finfish into an existing EPA database of mercury in edible seafood tissues, in addition to integrating and

leveraging NOAA research and modeling capabilities as well as increasing coordination of federal and state mercury research activities.

- Proposed Project: Bacterial Source Tracking (EPA) through developing molecular fingerprinting method(s) and a digital library to track animals associated with contaminated waters and establishing a Gulf States team.

Questions and Comments

- Florida likes proposed projects related to shellfish and bacterial source tracing.
- Federal agencies agree that they will need to focus on integration to make projects work, and not only within projects, but between them.
- Louisiana interested in mercury proposal.
- Texas interested in proposals related to HABs and mercury.
- Mississippi interested in mercury and bacterial source tracing proposals.
- Federal agencies offer states a chance to help IOOS prioritize their focus. Which sets of observations do the states think are important?

WHITE PAPER DISCUSSION 3: RESTORATION OF COASTAL WETLANDS

Preparation of the white paper on restoration of coastal wetlands was led by Louisiana.

Len Bahr, Director, Program for Applied Research in the Coastal Area, LA Governor's Office of Coastal Activities, presented a summary of the white paper.

- The MS River makes for unequal distribution of resources when you think of the amount of freshwater, nutrients, and sediments it puts into the system.
- The MS is a delta system and very different from an estuary.
- The lack of relief and topography is an important Gulf characteristic to consider.
- Wetlands loss differs among states. Louisiana is sinking, while development affects all.
- Monitoring needs to expand offshore and upstream.
- It is much more expensive to restore wetlands than to protect them in the first place.
- Hurricanes and catastrophic events shape the Gulf.
- Improvements in technology are helping the states.
- The Ocean Commission report does not mention estuaries or deltas.

Questions and Comments

- Discussion of what restoration means to each state
- Acquisition of land is the best way to restore/protect – Florida has strong program.
- Use of sediment in one place to restore in another place – sediment sharing.
- Proposed two nationally significant, but very different, geographic areas for states to focus on – Everglades & LA wetlands.
- In examining these two sites, propose to inventory all the restoration projects and compare.
- In protecting waters, consider the legal definition in regards to mean high/low water.

Federal Response—Bryon Griffith

- Tremendous diversity in scale, scope, and approach among states – one size does not fit all.
- Proposed Project: Corporate wetlands restoration partnership (EPA & ACOE). Facilitate the establishment of a comprehensive five-state, regional network in the Gulf region that includes state and private funds that local communities can apply to for match.
- Proposed Project: Coastal Infrastructure Risk Assessment (NOAA). Assessing risks to energy and chemical transportation & manufacturing infrastructure as a result of land loss, natural hazards, and human activities with a near-term goal to reduce loss, and longer-term goal to have no net loss.
- Proposed Project: Accurate Coastal Elevations (NOAA) continually operating reference stations along the coast by providing technical guidance and assistance as the Gulf States work to establish, coordinate, and disseminate geospatial data needed to understand and relate coastal elevation data.

Questions and Comments

- Florida would support the federal proposals and comfortable with getting grant match and other states are also willing to have grant matches a part of the proposal.
- Federal agencies cannot solicit money.

WHITE PAPER DISCUSSION 4: IDENTIFICATION OF GULF HABITATS TO INFORM MANAGEMENT

Preparation of the white paper on identification of Gulf habitats was led by Texas.

Kathleen Hartnett White, Chairman, Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, offered introductory remarks.

- Texas coastal population will double in the next 35 years.
- Water quantity is the state's biggest concern and freshwater inflow to estuaries affected.
- Regional initiatives should address human health and safety issues.
- We're drowning in data, but parched for information.

Bruce Moulton, Policy Advisor, Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, presented a summary of the paper.

- To better manage coastal habitats, it is necessary that the states begin laying the groundwork for improved ecosystem-based management.
- Integration of natural resource agencies is key to success.
- New and helpful technology crops up every day and we need to identify, use, and train on it.
- We need to inventory the existing habitat data, determine if in useable form, available, and can we use it on a Gulfwide basis.
- Develop additional partnerships.
- Focus on land acquisition.
- Standardize mapping techniques, frequencies, and reporting methodologies.
- Better communicate the importance of our efforts to the Governor, the public, and other coastal decision makers.

Questions and Comments

- We need to close data gaps, but ensure it is accurate and defensible data.
- States don't have the money to pay for travel for their staff to go and work on integration with other states or agencies.
- Request that the federal agencies better coordinate all the research and monitoring efforts like IOOS.
- There is frustration that the ties between science and policy are not strong enough – they inform each other, but still speak different languages.
- There's a need to better define "data gaps" and the application framework to do that.
- The local level decision makers need access to this data and information.
- States need regular mapping and USGS does regular mapping.
- NOAA and USGS are trying to get a roster of ongoing mapping efforts.

Federal Response—Bryon Griffith

- States must decide the priority – where gaps need be closed, what products will be produced and the type of structure that will support it.
- Proposed: Regional Coordination of Habitat ID Efforts (NASA) by increasing collaboration between federal and state agencies to leverage existing resources and expertise for addressing habitat identification available at the NASA Stennis Space Center in Mississippi.
- Proposed Project: Biogeographic Assessments (NOAA) will better incorporate and create comprehensive Gulf habitat data.
- States must look at a small precise area to start.

Questions and Comments

- Catalog from NASA of data that is available would be helpful.
- The user community must be involved in data frameworks planning.
- Natural resource managers rarely articulate their needs and questions well.
- Managers must be specific about the spatial and temporal parameters of their requests for information.
- Effective data integration hinges on policy makers and managers asking the right questions.
- Between science and policy is the integration and packaging of useful information.
- Managers need to set the goals and then science informs them.
- Seek a single vision for the Gulf about how fisheries should look and other issues, too.
- States have the opportunity to identify the application framework.
- There is no single system that will answer all your questions.
- Take it step by step – look at your plan, identify the goals and data needed at each step of the plan, then you may see some data needs that transcend all of these issues.

WHITE PAPER DISCUSSION 5: GULF OF MEXICO ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

Preparation of the white paper on reductions in nutrient loading was led by Alabama.

Amy King, Public Education & Outreach Coordinator, Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, presented a summary of the white paper.

- States found a lot of common ground on this white paper, but different amounts of coastline effects coastal learning opportunities.
- There is an overall decline in science literacy.
- Budget restraints and under funding is the number one constraint to effective education at all levels.

Questions and Comments

- States have a difficult time collaborating on environmental education curriculum due to differing standards and requirements
- Environmental education is not consistent and states have had to prioritize topics, grades and field experiences.
- There must be avenues beyond schools to bring environmental education to primary and secondary students.
- Lack of awareness of the Gulf is one of the most direct challenges we face.
- “Public support is like the estuary itself - impressively broad but deceptively shallow.” We need to better understand the impacts of our education and is it working and how?
- There is a general lack of literacy and a decline among scientists trying to communicate the value and importance of what they do to the general public
- Important to think about education all people, such as developers, landscapers, and even ourselves and our own agencies, such as the USACE.
- Society is increasingly out of touch with the environment and even teachers are uncomfortable with being outdoors.
- We face cultural issues around environmental education that keep some groups away from the Gulf.

Bryon Griffith – Federal Response

- Every federal agency has something to offer the environmental education issues the white papers request.
- Encourage the states to develop a funding structure for environmental education that is not as volatile.
- Proposed project: Coastal Ecosystem Learning Center (CELC) framework (EPA) to establish the first bi-national structure in that system of aquariums. A blueprint for points for delivery.
- Proposed project: Campaign for the Gulf (NOAA), a campaign for the Gulf of Mexico to make people aware of what they can do and what we have done in this.
- Proposed project: Gulf Educational Summit Workshop would provide sources, materials for creating a K-12 curriculum.

Questions and Comments

- If we want people to this effort is important than we need to build awareness – this area should be our priority.
- Development of more K-12 curriculum is not needed
- The Learning Center framework is good, but include NERRs and NEPs in the proposal and consider it also a point of input for the community.
- National Science Foundation could also support this effort.
- The Sportfish Restoration Act also provides education and funding.
- Florida will not be able to work with the curriculum proposal, unless the curriculum was already standards-based.
- Existing projects with USACE require public education; these efforts can be included
- Be cautious about education because success is tricky to measure. [note: what is tricky to measure? Success of existing programs?]

PERSPECTIVES FROM MEXICO AND THE GULF OF MEXICO STATES ACCORD

Gary Springer, Secretary-General, Gulf of Mexico States Accord, offered remarks:

- 75 U.S. Congressmen, 10 U.S. Senators and 5 Governors in five Gulf States.
- 7 of the 11 busiest ports in the U.S. are in the Gulf of Mexico.
- 20 percent of imported energy in the U.S. comes in through the Gulf including 60 percent of the U.S. oil and gas reserves are found in the Gulf.
- That's 10 times the Great Lakes and Chesapeake Bay region, but, these regions get 10 times the amount of funding for regional environmental programs than the Gulf.
- The Gulf is 200 times the size of any of those other basins.
- Primary goal is to have Mexico as part of this process.

WRAP-UP GROUP DISCUSSION AND NEXT STEPS

At the close of the meeting, participants discussion implications and next steps for generating an Action Plan for the Gulf of Mexico.

Comments and Observations

- Most agree that white papers are hitting the mark, although could use minor additions.
- White papers will not be rewritten.
- Try starting with the five priority issues, then write policy statements and actions then management plans.
- Not sure how to include states upstream – Gulf is a “liquid landfill.”
- Suggest a series of working groups that are open and increasingly participatory.
- Be careful about over promising input and/or resources on the local level.
- Have a consistent message in the region about GOMA – marketing.
- Important to include local mayors.
- Are the five themes still adequate – what about fish and wildlife?
- Important to tie our actions to quality of life for people.
- We need to look at how federal dollars are already being spent and identify if they can be directed towards this effort.

- It is important to have an open dialogue and not to let it break down among and between our agencies.

Next Steps

- State partners will meet over the summer and start drafting the Action Plan. Planning to meet in late July/early August. The next document produced will be a straw document.
- Federal partners will be part of the process, but the exact look of that will have to be decided.
- Important to define how local workshops will be included in Action Plan and to link it strongly to the Summit.
- Try to wrap up community workshops by early September.

MEETING ADJOURNED